



**T**he Administrative Office of Pennsylvania Courts, also called the Administrative Office and the AOPC, is the administrative arm of the Pennsylvania Supreme Court. It was established in January 1969 following the Constitutional Convention of 1967-68, which defined the Supreme Court's authority for supervision and administration of all courts.

The Court Administrator of Pennsylvania has been empowered to carry out the Supreme Court's administrative duties and is responsible for assuring that the business of the courts is promptly and properly disposed.

The Administrative Office conducts business from offices in Philadelphia and the Harrisburg area with its seven operational units divided between each. In addition to the Court Administrator's office, the three units in Philadelphia include Policy Research and Statistics, Legal, and Judicial Services. A fourth department -- Judicial Programs (formerly "Court Management") -- awaits reestablishment. The four departments in Mechanicsburg, just south of Harrisburg, are Administration, which includes Financial Systems, Payroll and Human Resources; the Judicial Computer System; Information Technology; and Communications/Legislative Affairs.

The Administrative Office's supervisory, administrative and long-range planning duties include:

- reviewing practices, procedures and efficiency at all levels of the court system and in all related offices
- developing recommendations to the Supreme Court regarding improvement of the system and related offices
- representing the judicial system before legislative bodies
- examining administrative and business methods used by offices in or related to the court system
- collecting statistical data

## Administrative Office of Pennsylvania Courts

- examining the state of the dockets and making recommendations for expediting litigation
- managing fiscal affairs, including budget preparation, disbursements approval, and goods and services procurement
- supervising all administrative matters relating to offices engaged in clerical functions
- maintaining personnel records
- conducting education programs for system personnel
- receiving and responding to comments from the public
- publishing an annual report
- providing legal services to system personnel.

A brief description of each unit of the AOPC and its functions follows.

### **Executive Office of the Court Administrator**

Staff provide visiting judges to assist with court backlogs and cases involving recusals and provide administrative support to the Court Administrator.

### **Policy Research and Statistics Department**

The Administrative Office's Policy Research and Statistics Department analyzes and evaluates the operations of the Unified Judicial System's various components. During any given year the department conducts a variety of studies, ranging from caseload management reviews of individual trial courts to statewide surveys of the structure and functioning of judicial support agencies, e.g., offices of the prothonotary and clerk of courts.

A core function of the department is to systematically assemble data on the caseloads of county and local courts, including the numbers and types of new, disposed and pending cases, and, for certain case types, the ages of the cases awaiting adjudication. The statistical information

is reviewed and periodically verified through audits of county dockets. The Administrative Office annually publishes the data in the *Caseload Statistics of the Unified Judicial System of Pennsylvania*. This report is available from the AOPC home page on the Internet, at <http://www.courts.state.pa.us> under "Administrative Office," in "AOPC Departments."

The Administrative Office uses the statistical information gathered for many purposes, including the monitoring of county court system operations and development of policy initiatives consistent with its mandate under the Rules of Judicial Administration.

Among the departmental projects recently completed or now in progress are:

- a case-processing study of Protection from Abuse petitions (PFAs) filed in the district justice and Common Pleas Courts. To facilitate the study and to provide meaningful data in this critical area, a statistical reporting system for PFAs was recently designed and implemented statewide.
- an analysis of trial court decisional delay based on the 1997 amendments to Rule of Judicial Administration 703
- an evaluation of the relative merits of mediation vs. litigation in child-custody and visitations disputes
- a survey of senior judge chamber facilities and support personnel.

Within the Policy Research and Statistics Department, the Docket Transcript Section receives, reviews and corrects data on all misdemeanor, felony and escalating summary cases filed in the 60 judicial districts. The information is submitted on paper forms and computer tapes. Staff send extracts of the data to the Pennsylvania State Police, where individual criminal histories, or rap sheets, are compiled. The AOPC and other state agencies also use the database for statistical research.

Another responsibility of the department lies in the design of the many forms used in the state court system. The development of new forms and the modification of existing forms require extensive consultation with system personnel, especially the "end-users" of the forms.

## Legal Department

The Legal Department provides advice and counsel to the Court Administrator and to the other units of the Unified Judicial System (UJS) while also assisting in various administrative areas.

Specifically, the chief counsel's staff represents UJS personnel -- including those of the various courts of the Commonwealth, the Disciplinary Board, and the Pennsylvania Board of Law Examiners -- in litigation. Actions involving UJS personnel often include suits filed in the federal district courts that raise various civil rights and constitutional issues. Typical state court proceedings involving court personnel pertain to petitions for review of governmental actions and petitions to determine the rights and duties of public officials.

Other significant activities involving counsel staff include:

- active participation in planning and implementing the Judicial Computer System, the statewide court automation program
- reviewing leases and contracts for appellate court offices and related offices, chambers and committees of the UJS
- providing legal and administrative assistance and advice to the Court Administrator
- assisting in the process of conducting proportionality reviews in first degree murder cases
- assisting in procurement matters
- reviewing legislation affecting the Judiciary.

## Communications/Legislative Affairs

In its role as both legislative and media liaison, the Office of Communications and

Legislative Affairs represents the AOPC before the state's executive and legislative branches of government, as well as to the media. As media liaison, staff field inquiries from reporters, draft press releases, publish the AOPC annual report, develop other publications and set up press conferences.

The office also monitors the progress of legislation in the General Assembly; compiles and publishes a legislative summary when the General Assembly is in session; and, when appropriate, comments on the effect legislation may have on the fiscal and administrative operations of the judicial system. With the computerization of district justice offices, staff also monitor and report on legislation that may necessitate changes to the district justice software programs.

## Judicial Computer System

The Judicial Computer System this year made major headlines in two separate but related areas. The first was passage of legislation removing both the annual and lifetime caps on deposits into the Judicial Computer System Augmentation Account (JCSAA). The second was the release of a highly complimentary report by the Legislative Budget and Finance Committee.

On June 25, 1997, Governor Ridge signed into law Act 32, which removed provisions limiting both the \$10 million annual cap and the \$100 million lifetime cap on deposits into the JCSAA. Removing the annual and lifetime caps is vital to the continued operation of the District Justice System (DJS) and will help provide a more stable funding base for the District Justice System. In prior years these caps cost the AOPC \$9.4 million, which was collected, but could not be used for the automated system because of the annual cap on deposits into the augmentation account. Removal of the lifetime cap eliminates an arbitrary limit on availability of funds to finance year-to-year Judicial Computer System operating costs.

Funds deposited into the JCSAA must still be appropriated by the General Assembly in the Judicial Computer System (JCS) annual budget. Removal of the annual cap is expected to allow access to additional funds when available and appropriated. For example, during fiscal year 1998-1999 available funds and an adequate appropriation level will allow the JCS to revive its plans for the Common Pleas Courts in preparation for: (1) pursuing that stalled project and (2) more accurately assessing on a current basis what the cost of automating Common Pleas criminal courts will be. This expansion is necessary to fulfill the Judiciary's goal of an integrated statewide information system which facilitates the data needs of the courts and with other agencies and departments involved in the criminal justice system.

The effectiveness of the JCS and the efficiency of the AOPC in managing this automated system connecting all district justice offices throughout the Commonwealth was commended in the report issued by the Legislative Budget and Finance (LB&F) Committee in October 1997. The report was issued following a lengthy audit by the LB&F Committee, which utilized the Gartner Group/ Real Decisions, a nationally recognized consultant, to assist in the technical evaluation of the DJS. This included examining how efficiently the AOPC spends the funds appropriated for the DJS.

The LB&F Committee reported:

- overall costs of the DJS are approximately one-half that of peer group average costs
- the significantly lower than peer group cost-per-call coupled with relatively high percentage of first level call resolutions are characteristics of a well-run, well-managed help desk environment
- overwhelmingly, district justices reported that computerization had improved the operation of their offices. For example, 97 percent responded affirmatively when asked

whether automation had resulted in positive changes...in such areas as case management, time lines of action and the collection and disbursement of fines, fees and costs.

The AOPC serves as the Judiciary's representative to the Justice Network (JNET) steering committee composed of ten major agencies involved at the state level in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania's criminal justice system. The goal of JNET is to enable appropriate electronic information-sharing between these agencies. More information on this project is available on the JNET web page at: [http://www.state.pa.us/Technology\\_Initiatives/jnet/home.htm](http://www.state.pa.us/Technology_Initiatives/jnet/home.htm).

During the fall of 1997, AOPC upgraded servers and software to mirror the JNET "Blueprint." Production information interchange links were established with the Pennsylvania State Police using the Commonwealth Metropolitan Area Network, which forms a part of JNET. These electronic links were used to implement the Jen & Dave law, which provides arrest information to custodial parents. Electronic Data Interchange via file transfer to the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation and Department of Corrections also was tested, using the JNET infrastructure. Although full-time JNET staff did not start during this period, existing staff was instrumental in prototyping electronic disposition posting, which will be a critical component of JNET functionality.

## Information Technology Department

The Information Technology Department provides staff and services for the JCS to bring automation to the courts of Pennsylvania. The department also provides electronic judicial information to other agencies; supports the AOPC's payroll, financial, human resources and administrative functions; and supports the AOPC's day-to-day office automation requirements. It is organized into a Software Development Unit and a Computer Operations Unit.

The AOPC Web Site provided increasing utility to courts and users of court information in Pennsylvania in 1997. Use of the AOPC Web site, <http://www.courts.state.pa.us>, increased from 1,500 users hitting the 563 pages of information available in 1996 to 3,832 users hitting the 2,409 pages of information available in 1997. The site received a total of 660,900 hits in 1997. Increased use of the AOPC Web site is reflected in a comparison of the number of hits in the month of December. In December 1996 users hit the AOPC Web site 15,169 times. In December 1997 the number of hits increased to 64,775 -- a four-fold increase.

### *Software Development Unit*

#### Statewide District Justice Automation System

In an effort to retain high levels of efficiency and benefit from advances in technology, the AOPC decided to upgrade the DJS operating system and replace and improve the forms management and printing system. This necessitated a wide range of changes to the DJS software forms system.

Also released for users were software changes needed to implement Act 104 of 1996, which provides for the use of collection agencies to collect unpaid fines, costs and restitution for adjudicated cases.

The Jen & Dave Line became the nation's first centralized, automated system for providing criminal charge information to individuals involved in custody cases when it went on-line in eight south central counties in September and was expanded statewide by the end of October. The system, which relies on the automated District Justice System for the bulk of its data, resulted in the modification of 15 programs/files and the creation of 39 new files by the Software Development Unit.

In addition to these major software development efforts, routine enhancements and

changes are constantly being made to the DJS software in response to user requests. In 1997 more than 466 changes were made by software development staff and released.

#### Administrative Support Application Project

Work continued on development of a client/server, Internet/Intranet-enabled application for the AOPC administrative offices, including payroll, finance, procurement and human resources. Highlights of 1997 include:

- completion of the conceptual design for each of the functional areas in Microsoft's Visual Basic
- completion of the initial database design in DB2/400
- commencement of work on legacy database conversion
- commencement of the development of the RFP for programming services for the project.

A major effort in 1997 was the software changes required to implement the Judiciary's new life insurance and disability programs.

#### Electronic Data Interchange (EDI) and Public Access

The Electronic Data Interchange (EDI) and Public Access section coordinates and manages public access to DJS data and the electronic interchange of this data with other county or state government agencies. In addition, this unit develops and maintains several small pc-based systems. Twenty-two counties use the Electronic Data Interchange Outbound (EDIOUT) data as input for their systems. The EDIOUT is also used to send information outbound from the DJS to other agencies and users.

Since the establishment of a public access policy in 1994, formal requests for data have increased. The EDI/Public Access section received and responded to 65 formal requests for information in 1997. Forty-eight of the requests were from other state and local agencies,

nine were from the media and nine were of a general public nature.

EDI activities continue to save other state and local agencies an estimated \$5.5 million per year by eliminating redundant keying. The savings figure is based on estimates taken from the total volume of data sent and the cost per key stroke. This is a static number because the caseload is relatively static. Data that we have added, such as that for the auditor general, wasn't keyed previously.

### *Computer Operations Unit*

In the spring of 1997, the AOPC began a statewide upgrade of the DJS computer platform. This was done to improve the interactive response times within the system, to upgrade the OS 400 and to replace an aging print system and improve forms management. In addition to improving efficiency and thus customer service with the faster response times, these changes have made the operating system more stable, made diagnosing problems easier, and have provided district justice offices with a backup receipt printer in the event the man printer is not functioning.

## **Judicial Computer Support Department**

The Judicial Computer Support Department provides training, responds to requests for equipment and provides help desk support for users of the JCS. The Director of Statewide Automation, who supervises the Judicial Computer Support Department, also serves as senior project manager or contract administrator for most AOPC information technology projects.

### *Training Unit*

In 1997 unit personnel trained 51 district justices, new employees or court administrators at the central site in Mechanicsburg.

In addition to training, the staff participated in performing research, analysis, testing and writing of program change requests in many areas. More than 11 major changes in software or upgrade changes required the input of this unit.

Trainers meet regularly with user groups to discuss concerns and suggestions regarding the automated system. Training staff researched and answered more than 5,000 second level help desk calls in 1997.

Work was begun on development of new documentation manuals for the automated system. This unit writes and prepares laser fax notices to the district justice offices.

### *Equipment Change Request Unit*

All statewide requests for additional hardware, to move hardware or to add new cable are coordinated through this unit. In 1997 the unit responded to requests for additional equipment in 125 offices.

### *Help Desk Unit*

The help desk responded to 56,714 calls in 1997. This included calls resulting from changes to the DJS brought about by new rule changes, new legislation and user suggestions or requests. Calls were motivated by new programs, accounting problems, two persons accessing the same record, slow system response time, equipment failure and incorrect processing.

Changes to the DJS are made frequently and this staff is trained by the programming unit so that it will be able to respond to problems or questions users may have when changes are released.

Help Desk staff also monitor the maintenance contract to ensure that any malfunctioning DJS equipment is fixed quickly so

that the office work schedule is not negatively impacted.

The unit designed and implemented the roll-out of the new model 4312 laser printers. The staff, working with the vendor, scheduled the installation of the new printers and the removal of old equipment as well as coordinated the new printer training schedule for district justice staff.

The Help Desk Unit also reviews the design of new programs prior to their release in order to evaluate their impact on user operations; answers questions from program-mers on user procedures; assembles user documentation for second-level calls and reviews laser faxes prior to their release in order to insure that they are clear.

### *Legal Services Unit*

The staff attorney assigned to the DJS has specific knowledge and expertise in legal issues related to the operation of the automated system. The attorney provides legal consul-tation to the programming and training staff on program design and provides an interface with the Civil and Criminal Procedural Rules Committees.

## **Administration Department**

The Administration Department, with staff in both Harrisburg and Philadelphia, is responsible for the day-to-day operations of the AOPC, providing support and services to other units of the Administrative Office, the appellate courts and the Unified Judicial System as a whole. It includes Human Resources, Financial Systems, Administrative Services and Payroll.

### *Human Resources Unit*

Human Resources staff responsibilities include:

- monitoring and ensuring UJS compliance with state and federal employment statutes such as the Fair Labor Standards Act, the Americans with Disabilities Act, the Family and Medical Leave Act, the Pennsylvania Human Relations Act, the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the State Employees' Retirement Code
- maintaining the UJS's fringe benefits programs and counseling Judiciary personnel regarding them. These programs include various primary and supplemental medical insurance plans, the UJS's life insurance, long-term disability insurance, paid leave, and Unemployment Compensation and Workers Compensation programs. Staff also administer separate work-related disability and accidental death programs for members of the Judiciary.
- developing and administering the personnel policies that govern the personnel operations of the UJS, and assisting supervisors and employees in the proper implementation of these policies
- assisting incoming and departing employees with a variety of questions and concerns relating to their Judiciary employment, and maintaining the Judiciary's COBRA Continuation Medical Insurance Program for former employees and dependents of Judiciary personnel
- maintaining the Judiciary's Retiree and Survivor Medical Insurance Programs that provide medical insurance coverage to retirees of the Judiciary and surviving spouses of deceased Judiciary personnel
- developing, implementing and maintaining a standardized classification and pay plan for Judiciary personnel. This plan includes a series of class specifications and job descriptions designed to establish a logical and consistent means of determining the relative value of one job to another.

- developing and administering AOPC hiring procedures and assisting managers in the recruiting, interviewing and hiring of new staff. This includes designing position advertisements, reviewing resumes to select candidates for interviews and completing background/reference checks on candidates.

In addition to its day-to-day human resource responsibilities, the AOPC Office of Human Resources is continuing its ongoing efforts with the AOPC Payroll Office and the Office of Financial Management to design and develop a fully integrated payroll, personnel and financial management system that will serve to fully automate these interrelated functions for the twenty-first century.

Finally, the AOPC Office of Human Resources is playing an integral role in ongoing efforts to (1) assess the impact of statewide funding of the courts on the Unified Judicial System, and (2) develop a strategic plan for the development and implementation of the new human resource policies and procedures that will be necessary to maintain the much larger and more diverse workforce that may result from actions to implement statewide funding of the Unified Judicial System.

### *Financial Systems Unit*

Financial Systems is responsible for managing all budgets and accounting for the Unified Judicial System. This responsibility includes:

- developing necessary policies and procedures on accounting and budget issues
- monitoring and preparing the budget request for 29 UJS line items in the Commonwealth's annual budget. This includes not only appropriations for the Administrative Office, but for all of the Commonwealth's courts; some court committees; juror cost reimbursements; and county court reimbursements. Staff also monitor budget trends, participate in

independent audits of all 29 line items and deal with operational issues and policies.

- managing \$197.8 million in annual appropriations to the Judiciary, including \$36 million in grants
- serving as the central clearinghouse for all financial transactions impacting the Judiciary
- overseeing the finances of the First Judicial District/AOPC Procurement Unit. The procurement unit, under an agreement between the Administrative Office and Philadelphia City government, was established to improve procurement in Philadelphia's three courts, including purchases, service contracts and reconciliation. Since the agreement was put into effect, the First Judicial District has seen a significant reduction in its procurement expenses.
- completing special projects, e.g., assisting in analyzing legislation for fiscal impact
- responding to questions on the Judiciary's financial operations posed by the legislature, the executive branch, other Judiciary employees and the public.

### *Administrative Services Unit*

Administrative Services oversees a variety of administrative-related tasks, including procurement for the Administrative Office and for Philadelphia courts under the First Judicial District/AOPC Procurement Unit. It also handles all issues relating to the operation of AOPC office buildings and provides support to many UJS agencies in a variety of ways.

### *Payroll Unit*

The Payroll Unit administers the monthly, biweekly and supplemental payrolls for more than 1,600 jurists and staff. Together with the Human Resources Unit it also orients and

answers any questions new employees may have as the employees become members of the Judiciary staff.

## Judicial Services Department

The Judicial Services Department plans, coordinates, administers and provides staff support for an extensive schedule of educational conferences, seminars and meetings for the Supreme Court, the Administrative Office and affiliated groups.

In 1997 the department coordinated four major conferences:

- *Pennsylvania Association of Court Management Mid-Annual Conference*  
State College, PA  
January 1997
- *Pennsylvania Conference of State Trial Judges Mid-Annual Conference*  
Pittsburgh, PA  
February 1997
- *President Judges/Pennsylvania Association of Court Management Annual Conference*  
State College, PA  
June 1997
- *Pennsylvania Conference of State Trial Judges Annual Conference*  
Hershey  
July 1997

Through aggressive negotiation and detailed knowledge of Pennsylvania's hospitality industry, the Judicial Services Department is able to ensure that multi-day conferences proceed effectively under terms which are favorable to the Commonwealth.

Judicial Services also negotiates office space for judicial offices across the Commonwealth, subject to final legal review by the chief counsel's staff, and maintains a computerized data bank of contact information for the Unified Judicial System's affiliated groups. It also maintains and updates all Pennsylvania state department lists, handles all financial disclosures, and disseminates news clippings of interest statewide for the Pennsylvania Judiciary.

Judicial Services' other functions include publishing *Jurisprudence*, a judicial newsletter linking Pennsylvania's trial judges across the state; serving as liaison and secretariat for the Supreme Court Ad Hoc Committee on Evidence; working with the Joint Task Force to insure Gender Fairness in the Courts and the Joint Task Force to insure Racial & Ethnic Fairness in the Courts; and acting as liaison to the Minor Judiciary Education Board. 